

Striped like a badger: New genus of bat identified in South Sudan

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This image show the beautiful bat species *Numbaha superba*. Credit: DeeAnn Reeder, Bucknell University

Researchers have identified a new genus of bat after discovering a rare specimen in South Sudan. With wildlife personnel under the South Sudanese Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism, Bucknell Associate Professor of Biology DeeAnn Reeder and Fauna & Flora International (FFI) Programme Officer Adrian Garside were leading a

team conducting field research and pursuing conservation efforts when Reeder spotted the animal in Bangangai Game Reserve.

"My attention was immediately drawn to the bat's strikingly beautiful and distinct pattern of spots and stripes. It was clearly a very extraordinary animal, one that I had never seen before," recalled Reeder. "I knew the second I saw it that it was the find of a lifetime."

After returning to the United States, Reeder determined the bat was the same as one originally captured in nearby Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1939 and named *Glauconycteris superba*, but she and colleagues did not believe that it fit with other [bats](#) in the [genus](#) *Glauconycteris*.

"After careful analysis, it is clear that it doesn't belong in the genus that it's in right now," Reeder said. "Its cranial characters, its wing characters, its size, the ears—literally everything you look at doesn't fit. It's so unique that we need to create a new genus."

In the paper, "A new genus for a rare African vespertilionid bat: insights from South Sudan" just published by the journal *ZooKeys*, Reeder, along with co-authors from the Smithsonian Institution and the Islamic University in Uganda, placed this bat into a new genus - Niumbaha. The word means "rare" or "unusual" in Zande, the language of the Azande people in Western Equatoria State, where the bat was captured. The bat is just the fifth specimen of its kind ever collected, and the first in South Sudan, which gained its independence in 2011.

"To me, this discovery is significant because it highlights the biological importance of South Sudan and hints that this new nation has many natural wonders yet to be discovered. South Sudan is a country with much to offer and much to protect," said Matt Rice, FFI's South Sudan country director. FFI is using its extensive experience of working in

conflict and post-conflict countries to assist the South Sudanese government as it re-establishes the country's wildlife conservation sector and is also helping to rehabilitate selected protected areas through training and development of park staff and wildlife service personnel, road and infrastructure development, equipment provision, and supporting research work.

The team's research in South Sudan was made possible by a \$100,000 grant that Reeder received from the Woodtiger Fund. The private research foundation recently awarded Reeder another \$100,000 dollar grant to continue her research this May and to support FFI's conservation programs.

"Our discovery of this new genus of bat is an indicator of how diverse the area is and how much work remains," Reeder added. "Understanding and conserving biodiversity is critical in many ways. Knowing what species are present in an area allows for better management. When species are lost, ecosystem-level changes ensue. I'm convinced this area is one in which we need to continue to work."

More information: Reeder DM, Helgen KM, Vodzak ME, Lunde DP, Ejtore I (2013) A new genus for a rare African vespertilionid bat: insights from South Sudan. *ZooKeys* 285: 89. [doi: 10.3897/zookeys.285.4892](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.285.4892)

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